

It has been many years since I have attended the Annual Anishinaabemowin Teg Conference. It has been held at the Kewadin Convention Center in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan each year. The first session I attended was presented by Marilyn Debassige. She provided teachings on Ojibwe Moss Bags. She alternated between Anishinaabemowin and English during her talk. She was an excellent speaker and created an environment where you kind of felt like she was your grandma sharing stories and important knowledge with you. She told us that the moss bag is the portion of a cradleboard that holds the baby. It is supposed to mimic the comforting and safe environment found in the womb. She also taught us about how baby boys are wrapped differently from girls and why. She has visited LTBB before and provided a workshop on how to make the moss bags and the teachings associated with it. I had heard about the workshop and about how enjoyable it was for people who attended. I am glad that community members were given the opportunity to learn from Marilyn, previously; maybe we can invite her back.

The next session I sat in on was “Anung Knowledge From An Anishinaabe Perspective” with Waaseyaa’sin Christine Sy and Cecelia LaPointe. Their presentation began with some history and translations of both Shawnee and Anishinaabemowin ways of saying Tecumseh’s name. This was to connect to and honor the theme of this year’s conference, “Zaagtoodaa Tikamseying Neyab.” Next, they went through many names that have their origins in terms related to the Sky World and astronomical events. Lastly, they went through various constellations and stars, and they gave the scientific name for some, then the Greek/Roman names and the Anishinaabemowin translations.

Another session I attended that had a huge impact on me was “The Importance of the Anishinaabe Language Pertaining to Visions” with Perry Bebamash. He spoke about several different types of spirits and the importance of learning our language in order to understand what they have to tell us when we see them. He talked about the memegwesi, misabe and the thunderbird. The stories

about the memegwesag meant a lot to me because I have been researching how these spirits might be connected to my family name. I don't believe in coincidences, so it made me happy to have had the opportunity to learn more about these spirits. The presenter also spoke about his teacher and many old language resources and published writings that support the stories he has heard. He showed video clips of the 1967 Paterson film, video clips of his teacher and sound recordings he did with this teacher. It reminded me of how important it is to record the stories that are told in our area. You never know where you might find important cultural knowledge as you listen to stories being told. It is vital that we continue to document knowledge from our older citizens and to share that with our community.

The next session I attended was "Esbikenh Part 2- Anishinaabemowin Miinwaa Waasmowinmzinigan – Anshinaabemowin and the Internet." I had heard really positive things about the presenter and was really looking forward to hearing him present. However, he ended up having to go to the emergency room the night before and was unable to do his presentation. Instead, Margaret Noori, from the University of Michigan, stepped in and did a great job of providing us information on technologically-based resources for language teaching and learning. She showed us a great "app" called "Neechee" that helps you translate phrases from Anishinaabemowin to English right on your smart-phone. She also had tons of links to websites that have either materials for learning and practicing the language or resources where you can find examples of language. She directed us to Esbikenh's YouTube Channel where he has many videos posted and to the University of Michigan's Language and Anishinaabemowin resources website. These are great resources to use especially with youth and those that are well-versed in technology. Ms. Noori made a very good point that we need to get more resources out there. It's more important that we get things out there instead of getting bogged down with making sure all of the "bugs" are worked out first. It's becoming more accessible and cheap to get things out there, so we need to take advantage of that.

I also attended a session presented by Kenny Pheasant called, “Noojimowin-Healing.” It was a very personal session where he began by talking about the passing of his daughter, and how that tragedy inspired his newest endeavor. He said that the mourning process had inspired him to really contemplate the language associated with death, mourning, loss and the dead. He did many teachings on the origins of language and the meanings behind the words. Kenny then went into talking about his new “Distant Hugs” non-profit business where he and his wife create custom-ordered scarves that can be sent to individuals as a “distant hug” from a loved one or as a sign of support/caring for someone. The profits from the scarves are donated to charity.

Another session I went to was “Personal Healing – A Traditional Native Perspective” with Mary and Robert Pheasant. This couple spoke in the style that you would see during ceremonies/talking circles. They took turns talking about their own healing journey and how we can begin to heal ourselves from past trauma. They also made several points about how vital it is to heal yourself both spiritually and physically in order to be of the best service to your community. They also talked about how communities can utilize traditional teachings in health programs such as diabetes prevention and in caring for those that have diabetes, currently.

I also attended a session with a Mr. Vernon Roote called the “Life Experiences of One Leader and His Journey to Becoming a Grand Chief.” Mr. Roote spoke about several different topics related to leadership, the “social-health” of our communities and the need to spend more time and energy teaching our young men about their roles. He has written a book as a resource for male, Native youth to learn what their place is in the success and health of our tribes. He also had many profound things to say and very strong opinions about the state of our people today. Some points he made were... We have to provide our children with the teachings needed to effectively walk in two worlds, to be able to jump between both of those worlds. How do I balance myself? We need to have a strong

background in Anishinaabemowin and culture AND quality, grade-level, non-native education. It boils down to balance!!! The definition of “leadership qualities” should maybe start with wording that states “having a good firm knowledge of our culture.” He said that we are really talking about unraveling learned behavior. We don't have any outside enemies anymore; we have it within ourselves, we need to figure out how to fix this and undo that behavior in order for us to move ahead. He also went into the topic of nation building; the process of bringing together us as Anishinaabek.

These were just the highlights of the sessions I attended. I was also able to help get four LTBB youth to the conference as well. The four young ladies that attended were Nicole Laughlin, Josephine Laughlin, Margaret Gasco and Anna Gasco, all from Harbor Springs High School. There were also several other young, tribal Citizens in attendance such as Becca Lynn, Sarah Schilling and Brittany Bentley. It was great to see not only those younger people from our community in attendance, but many other LTBB Citizens and Tribal Government Staff. I am very grateful to Carla Osawamick for working so hard to ensure that the youth from the Harbor Springs High School Anishinaabemowin Language class were able to attend.

I would like to say thank you, again, for the opportunity to attend this event and hope to assist in bringing some of the information, knowledge and, possibly, some of the speakers to our community.

Respectfully submitted by,

Winnay J. Wemigwase